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"In Tuscan fields, the winds in odours steeped": Mary Shelley's Tuscany

Abstract: Mary Shelley loved Italy, the country where she resided for more than five years – from 30 March 1818 to 25 July 1823 – after fleeing England with her husband, who left unpaid debts behind him. Tuscany is where the couple lived longest, and the region figures prominently in Mary's writings. Referring, occasionally, to the author's letters and journals, and Percy Bysshe Shelley's poetry and letters, my article intends to explore the various forms such a presence assumes in a selection of works, notably the novel *Valperga* (1823), the narrative essay "Recollections of Italy" (1824), and the story "A Tale of the Passions" (1823). From this survey, it will emerge how Tuscany is present with its landscape and topography, climate, language, literature, history, traditions, and the daily life of the common people.

Keywords: Mary Shelley. Percy Bysshe Shelley. Italy. Tuscany. Fiction.

Italy was Mary Shelley's homeland of choice. She resided here permanently, in fact, for almost five and a half years. She and Percy came to Italy after fleeing England in stormy circumstances, when they were very young. Italy was on several occasions defined by the couple as the "Paradise of exiles", as proof of how much they felt at home. The definition, which later became proverbial, appeared for the first time in the poem "Julian and Maddalo" on the lips of Julian, who is a mask of the poet himself:

> Oh!
> How beautiful is sunset, when the glow
> Of heaven descends upon a land like thee,
> Thou paradise of exiles, Italy!
> Thy mountains, seas, and vineyards, and the towers
> Of cities they encircle! – It was ours
> To stand on thee, beholding it: […][1]

Percy composed these lines, which seem a real hymn to Italy, in September 1818, when, after leaving his family (who joined him later) in Bagni di Lucca, he settled in Este, in Villa Cappuccini, which his friend Lord Byron had rented and allowed him to use. The phrase "Paradise of exiles" returns in a letter the poet wrote on 17 January 1820, when he was in Pisa. In urging his cousin Thomas Medwin to join him, he asserted: "Italy is the place for you – the very place – The Paradise of exiles – the retreat

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[1] P.B. Shelley, "Julian and Maddalo: A Conversation", in Id., *Posthumous Poems*, London, John and Henry L. Hunt, 1824, p. 7.

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of Pariahs – but I am thinking of myself rather than of you".[2] Mary made the metaphor her own and reused it in the letter she wrote to Leigh Hunt on 9 September 1823 (i.e., fifteen days after her return to England), where she declared that she was relatively pleased, although she was not in the "Paradise of Exiles". The word 'Paradise' is even underlined in the original.[3]

The writer felt at home in Italy, as evidenced by the fact that she continued to reside here for another year after her husband's death, and left the country only because she was forced to do so by her father-in-law, Sir Timothy, who otherwise would not have contributed to the maintenance of his nephew Percy Florence, future heir to the title of baronet. Percy Florence was named so in honour of the city that gave birth to him. In fact, the couple's only child who survived infancy was born in Florence on 12 November 1819. This alone would suffice to show how much Italy played a central role in the author's life. As she herself declared, Italy witnessed her greatest joys and her greatest *sorrows*. In addition to her husband, she lost two children here, Clara, who died of dysentery in Venice when she was only one year old (on 24 September 1818), and William, who died of malaria in Rome at three and a half years (on 7 June 1819). Moreover, on 16 June 1822, while she was in San Terenzo, near Lerici, Mary had a miscarriage that, as the doctor later said, would have cost her life if Percy had not been prompt enough to immerse her in a tub full of ice, thus stopping the copious bleeding.[4] The double value that Italy had for the author is evident from the poem "The Choice", which she completed before leaving the country and transcribed on the back of the "Journal of Sorrow" that she kept in the first two years after Percy's death. Here, Italy is at first seen as a symbol of her loss and called "a tomb", but then the end of the second verse paragraph reveals to what a degree the poet experienced leaving Italy as a real uprooting, as yet another trauma she had to suffer: "Tear me not hence – here let me live & die, / In my adopted land, my country, Italy!".[5]

During their Italian sojourn, the Shelleys led an almost nomadic life: they moved incessantly, and constantly changed houses. Retracing all their movements in Mary's journals is extremely difficult. However, there is no doubt that Tuscany was the region the couple loved the most, and where they resided the longest. The overall lengthiest stay was in "dear Pisa",[6] whose mild climate Percy found particularly beneficial to his health.[7] As Mary wrote in a note to her husband's poems:

[2] P.B. SHELLEY, "17 January 1820", in ID., *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. F.L. JONES, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1964, Vol. II, p. 170.

[3] "I am in little neat lodgeings [*sic*] – my boy in bed, I quiet – and I will now talk to you; tell you what I have seen and heard, and with as little repining as I can try, by making the best of what I have, the certainty of your friendship & kindness, to rest half content tho' I am not in the 'Paradise of Exiles'" (M. SHELLEY, "To Leigh Hunt, 9 September 1823", in EAD., *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, ed. B.B. BENNETT, Baltimore and London, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980, Vol. I, p. 377).

[4] See P.B. SHELLEY, "18 June 1822", in ID., *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, Vol. II, p. 434.

[5] M. SHELLEY, *The Journals of Mary Shelley, 1814-1844*, eds P.R. FELDMAN and D. SCOTT-KILVERT, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1987, Vol. II, pp. 490, 492.

[6] M. SHELLEY, "To Jane Williams, 19-20 February 1823", in EAD., *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, Vol. I, p. 311.

[7] This is what Mary communicated, with evident satisfaction, to Maria Gisborne: "You will be glad to hear that Shelley's health is much improved this winter – he is not quite well but he is much better – The air of Pisa

We then removed to Pisa, and took up our abode there for the winter. The extreme mildness of the climate suited Shelley, and his solitude was enlivened by an intercourse with several intimate friends. Chance cast us, strangely enough, on this quiet half-unpeopled town; but its very peace suited Shelley, – its river, the near mountains, and not distant sea, added to its attractions, and were the objects of many delightful excursions.[8]

The writer, however, had been sometimes merciless towards the city and its inhabitants, and, in the early days of her stay, she had sealed a very unflattering description stating in no uncertain terms that she detested the Pisans:

Pisa is a pretty town, but its inhabitants w[d] exercise all Hoggs vocabulary of scamps, raffs &c &c to fully describe their ragged-haired, shirtless condition. Many of them are students of the university & they are none of the genteelest of the crew. Then there are Bargees, beggars without number; galley slaves in their yellow & red dress with chains – the women in dirty cotton gowns trailing in the dirt – pink silk hats starting up in the air to run away from their ugly faces in this manner (for they always tie the bows at the points [of] their chins – & white satiny shoes – & fellows with bushy hair – large whiskers, canes in their hands, & a bit of dirty party coloured riband (a symbol of nobility) sticking in their button holes) that mean to look like the lords of the rabble but who only look like their drivers – The Pisans I dislike more than any of the Italians & none of them are as yet favourites with me.[9]

Yet, differently from what happened in the other Italian cities where the couple lived, in Pisa a circle formed around the Shelleys, which also included some locals: Francesco Pacchiani, professor at the University of Pisa; the improviser Tommaso Sgricci; the young Teresa Viviani, daughter of the Governor of Pisa and famous for being the Lady Emilia V., dedicatee of Percy Shelley's *Epipsychidion*; the doctor-surgeon Andrea Vaccà Berlinghieri, whom someone has identified as the inspirer of the character of Victor Frankenstein;[10] Count Pietro Gamba, exiled from Ravenna for political reasons, and his sister Teresa, Lord Byron's lover. In a letter written to his wife from Ravenna on 16 August 1821, while assessing whether or not to relocate to Florence, Percy even declared: "Our roots were never struck so deeply as at Pisa & the transplanted tree flourishes not".[11] From Pisa, the Shelleys moved to spend long periods in Bagni di Pisa, otherwise called San Giuliano Terme. In 1821, they remained there for nearly six months, from 8 May to 25 October.

Proof of how much the couple loved thermal localities is also the time they spent in Bagni di Lucca, which was one of their first destinations in Italy. The Shelleys – with Mary's stepsister, Claire Clairmont, in tow – arrived in Italy on 30 March 1818, and after spending about one month in Milan, in May they were already in Tuscany. On the 7th they were in Pisa and on the 9th in Leghorn, a town that the author called "stupid"

is so mild and delightful and the exercise on horseback agrees with him particularly" (M. SHELLEY, "To Maria Gisborne, 20 December 1821", in EAD., *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, Vol. I, p. 213).

[8] M. SHELLEY, "Note on the Poems of 1820. By the Editor", in *The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. M. SHELLEY, London, Edward Moxon, 1839, p. 279.

[9] M. SHELLEY, "To Marianne Hunt, 24 February [error for 24 March] 1820", in EAD., *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, Vol. I, pp. 136-37.

[10] This thesis was advanced by Virgilio Papini in his essay-novel *Un the con Mary: un viaggio romantico. La vera storia del* Frankenstein, Lucca, Sodalizio per l'Arte, 2005. The author then re-proposed it in the episode of the television program *Mistero* broadcasted by "Italia 1" on 6 February 2014.

[11] P.B. SHELLEY, "16 August 1821", in ID., *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, Vol. II, p. 339.

in her journal.[12] The following month, precisely on 11 June, from Leghorn they moved to Bagni di Lucca, to Casa Bertini, which Percy had rented from "Signor" Chiappa. Here they remained for more than two and a half months, until 31 August 1818. The literary product that was most influenced by the period spent in Bagni was certainly the second novel published by the author, which came out on 19 February 1823: *Valperga: or, The Life and Adventures of Castruccio, Prince of Lucca*. It was in a letter she wrote to Leigh Hunt later that year that Mary described *Valperga*'s scenery and the actual landscape that had inspired her in the composition of the work:

> Passing through the plain of Lucca & the Val di Nievole you will see much of the scenery of Valperga – If you stay to rinfrescare there, my dear friend – go to the top of the tower of the palace of Guinigi an old tower as ancient as those times – look towards the opening of the hills, on the road to the Baths of Lucca, & on the banks of the Serchio & you will see the site of Valperga and towards the west you will see a dark wood where they will tell you there are the ruins of a castle which Castruccio built – & that wood is the scene of the incantations where Castruccio & Tripalda appear.[13]

Valperga is the name of the castle owned by the young Countess Euthanasia dei Adimari. The importance the toponym plays in the novel is already evident from the fact that it gives it its title. Valperga is an imaginary place, exquisitely feminine, which becomes the emblem of a utopian counter-history that contrasts male ambition and the logic of conquest at all costs with empathy and universal love. The position of Valperga is highly significant, since it is symbolically equidistant between Lucca and Florence, the two cities involved in the conflict between the Ghibellines and the Guelphs on which the story focuses.

The novel is rich in landscape descriptions where the author shows an extraordinary capacity for observation. If the castle of Valperga is an ideal place, the topography of Tuscany that is drawn in the work could not be more real in its detailed precision. As Lilla Maria Crisafulli and Keir Elam note, *Valperga* can also be read as an actual map of the Shelleyan sites, since it traces the eventful itinerary of Mary and Percy's Italian sojourn:[14] the Alps, the Val di Susa, Lombardy, Rome, the Bay of Naples and the Vesuvius. Obviously, we also find the many places of their residence in Tuscany: Florence, Pisa, Lucca (birthplace of Castruccio), and Bagni di Lucca. The *incipit* to Chapter IX, entitled "Castle of Valperga described. Friendship and Love", follows the protagonist as he rides across the plain of Lucca towards the hills of Bagni and admires the Apennine peaks that stand out in front of him:

> "This is a well known road to me", thought Castruccio, as he rode across the plain of Lucca towards the hills of the Baths; "there is still that mountain, that as a craggy and mighty wall surmounts and bounds the other Apennines; the lower peaks are still congregated round it, attracting and arresting the clouds that pause on their summits, and then slowly roll off. What a splendid garb of snow these old mountains have thrown over themselves, to shield them from the *tramontano,* that buffets them all the winter long, while their black sides appear almost as the shadows of a marble statue".[15]

[12] M. SHELLEY, *The Journals of Mary Shelley, 1814-1844*, Vol. I, p. 209.

[13] M. SHELLEY, "To Leigh Hunt, 7 August 1823", in EAD., *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, Vol. I, p. 364.

[14] See M. SHELLEY, *Valperga. Vita e avventure di Castruccio, principe di Lucca*, a cura di L.M. CRISAFULLI e K. ELAM, Milano, Mondadori, (1823) 2021, p. XVII.

[15] M. SHELLEY, *Valperga: or, The Life and Adventures of Castruccio, Prince of Lucca*, ed. T. RAJAN, Peterborough (Ontario), Broadview Press, (1823) 1998, p. 139.

The contemplation of the landscape, which shows evident affinities with the description taken from the letter to Leigh Hunt mentioned above, triggers a sort of journey back in time in Castruccio, resurfacing dormant memories of his childhood and adolescence:

> Castruccio's heart was much softened, as he successively recognized objects, which he had forgotten for so many years, and with which he had been most intimately acquainted. The peculiar form of the branches of a tree, the winding of an often-trod mountain-path, the murmurs of small streams, their banks bedecked with dwarf shrubs; things which would have appeared uncharacterized to one who viewed them for the first time; bore for him some distinguishing mark, some peculiar shape, which awoke within him memories that had been long laid asleep.[16]

The meticulous description of the route from Lucca to Valperga leads to the equally detailed presentation of the castle itself, and then culminates in the portrayal of its "lovely possessor".[17]

The Tuscan natural landscape is again overtly connected to the memorial process and assumes an autobiographical character in the already mentioned elegiac poem entitled "The Choice", which offers one of Mary Shelley's most accomplished literary expressions of her mourning for both her husband and her son William:

> 'Tis thus the past on which my spirit leans,
> Makes dearest to my soul Italian scenes. –
> In Tuscan fields, the winds in odours steeped
> From flowers and cypresses – when skies have wept,
> Shall like the notes of music – once most dear,
> Which brings the unstrung voice upon my ear
> Of one beloved, to memory display
> Past scenes – past joys – past hopes, in long array.
> The Serchio's stream upon whose banks he stood –
> The pools reflecting Pisa's old pine wood,
> The fire-flies beam – the aziolo's cry –
> All breath his spirit, which shall never die. –
> Such memories have linked these hills & caves,
> These woodland paths, & streams – & knelling waves
> Fast to each sad pulsation of my breast
> And made their melancholy arms the haven of my rest.[18]

However, it is in "Recollections of Italy" that we find an overall appreciation of Tuscany, which involves not only its natural landscape but also its inhabitants. Mary Shelley wrote this narrative essay in October 1823, a couple of months after her return to England, and påublished it in the *London Magazine*, anonymously, in January 1824. The "three weeks of incessant rain, at Midsummer" on which the narrative opens refer us to that aversion to the English climate that the author often manifested in her letters. Equally recurrent in her correspondence is the predilection for the mildness of the Italian (and Tuscan) climate. Such a preference is also expressed in the following description of the Sienese countryside, which is taken from "The Brother and Sister, an Italian Story":

[16] *Ibidem*.
[17] *Ibidem*, p. 141.
[18] M. SHELLEY, *The Journals of Mary Shelley, 1814-1844*, Vol. II, pp. 493-94.

Spring was opening with all the beauty which that season showers upon favoured Italy; while blights and chilly rain usually characterise it in these northern lands. The almond and peach-trees were in blossom; and the vine-dresser sang at his work, perched with his pruning-knife among the trees. Blossoms and flowers, in laughing plenty, graced the soil; and the trees, swelling with buds ready to expand into leaves, seemed to feel the life that animated their dark old boughs.[19]

A reason for which Mary resented leaving Pisa was precisely the climate, as we infer from a letter she wrote to Jane Williams from Genoa: "I do not know what to say to you of Marianne [Hunt]'s health, for I do not know what to think of it myself. She ought to have remained at Pisa for this is a frightful climate, cold & rainy. […] This place is almost as unlike Pisa as England can be – We have a succession of rains, storms & wind, such as I never before witnessed in Italy".[20]

Going back to "Recollections of Italy", the work is written in the form of a dialogue and, as the title suggests, it is autobiographical. The setting is Henley upon Thames, a town near Marlow, where the Shelleys lived between 1817 and 1818 (just before moving to Italy), and where Mary concluded *Frankenstein*, conceived the novel *Valperga* and gave birth to their daughter Clara. The narrator embodies the typical English traveller who is too self-referential and biased to appreciate the beauties of Italy. He is the un-Italianised English "endowed with Spurzheim's bump, denominated stayathomeativeness", from whom the Anglo-Italian Mary will distance herself in the review of "The English in Italy", published in 1826 in the *Westminster Review*.[21] The narrator's interlocutor, Edmund Malville, represents instead the author's point of view, and his description of Italian localities incorporates excerpts from the Shelleys' writings. For example, the excursion from Bagni di Pisa to Vicopisano follows the trip that the Shelleys made with Edward and Jane Williams on 15 September 1821, and the description of the view that a moved Malville puts on the lips of his "best, and now lost friend" incorporates *verbatim* a prose fragment by Shelley himself, which would be published only in 1862:

"Look", cried my best, and now lost friend, "behold the mountains that sweep into the plain like waves that meet in a chasm; the olive woods are as green as a sea, and are waving in the wind; the shadows of the clouds are spotting the bosoms of the hills; a heron comes sailing over us; a butterfly flits near; at intervals the pines give forth their sweet and prolonged response to the wind, the myrtle bushes are in bud, and the soil beneath us is carpeted with odoriferous flowers".[22]

The "carpet of odoriferous flowers" that appears in the last two quoted passages could be reminiscent of the "Prato Fiorito", which, as we learn from the Shelleys' letters and the author's journals, was the destination of one of Mary and Percy's rides during their stay in Bagni di Lucca.[23] Although neither writer properly described the flowery spot

[19] [M. SHELLEY], "The Brother and Sister, an Italian Story", in *The Keepsake* for MDCCCXXXIII, ed. F. MANSEL REYNOLDS, London, Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green, and Longman, 1832, pp. 124-25.

[20] M. SHELLEY, "To Jane Willams, 5 December 1822", in EAD., *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, Vol. I, pp. 295, 297.

[21] See [M. SHELLEY], "The English in Italy", *The Westminster Review*, October 1826, pp. 327-28.

[22] [M. SHELLEY], "Recollections of Italy", *The London Magazine*, January 1824, pp. 25-26. For Percy's virtually identical version, see P.B. SHELLEY, "Fragment xxxviii", in ID., *Relics of Shelley*, ed. R. GARNETT, London, Edward Moxon & Co., 1862, pp. 89-90.

[23] In her letter to Mary Gisborne of 2 July, Mary wrote: "For us we generally walk Except last Tuesday,

in their records, the impression they received must have been enormous. In fact, as Percy told his cousin, the scent of jonquils almost made him faint:

He did not there [in Bagni di Lucca] forget to visit the Prato fiorito, a spot on the mountain, carpeted with jonquils, from which the place takes the name of the Meadow of Flowers. So powerful is their odour, that many persons have fainted with their excess of sweetness, and Shelley has described to me, that they were nearly producing on him the same effect.[24]

That the memory, for Percy at least, was also lasting is proved by *Epipsychidion*, which he composed three years later in Pisa, and where we see how the scent of jonquils is deemed capable of inducing fainting: "And from the moss violets and jonquils peep /And dart their arrowy odour through the brain / Till you might faint with that delicious pain".[25]

The following passage is taken from "Recollections of Italy" and contains excerpts from the description of Tuscany and its inhabitants. It is interesting to note how the judgment on the Tuscans, which opens the section, is very different from the one quoted above, which dated back to the early days of Mary Shelley's stay in Pisa:

… and now [I] bring you to Tuscany. After all I have said of the delights of the south of Italy I would choose Tuscany for a residence. Its inhabitants are courteous and civilized. I confess that there is a charm for me in the manners of the common people and servants. Perhaps this is partly to be accounted for from the contrast which they form with those of my native country; and all that is unusual, by divesting common life of its familiar garb, gives an air of gala to everyday concerns. These good people are courteous, and there is much *piquanc*e in the shades of distinction which they make between respect and servility, ease of address and impertinence. Yet this is little seen and appreciated among their English visitors. […] The country of Tuscany is cultivated and fertile, although it does not bear the same stamp of excessive luxury as in the south. […] In spring, nature arises in beauty from her prison, and rains sunbeams and life upon the land. Summer comes up in its green array, giving labour and reward to the peasants. Their plenteous harvests, their Virgilian threshing floors, and looks of busy happiness, are delightful to me. The balmy air of night, Hesperus in his glowing palace of sunlight, the flower-starred earth, the glittering waters, the ripening grapes, the chestnut copses, the cuckoo, and the nightingale, – such is the assemblage which is to me what balls and parties are to others. And if a storm come, rushing like an armed band over the country, filling the torrents, bending the proud heads of the trees, causing the clouds' deafening music to resound, and the lightning to fill the air with splendour; I am still enchanted by the spectacle which diversifies what I have heard named the monotonous blue skies of Italy.
In Tuscany the streams are fresh and full, the plains decorated with waving corn, shadowed by trees and trellised vines, and the mountains arise in woody majesty behind to give dignity to the scene.[26]

Thus, the Tuscans would be "courteous and civilized". The primacy of Tuscany in terms of 'civilisation' had already been expressed in the *incipit* of *Valperga*, where it

When Shelley and I took a long ride to il prato fiorito; a flowery meadow on the top of one of the neighbouring Appenines" (M. SHELLEY, "To Maria Gisborne, 2 July 1818", in EAD., *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, Vol. I, p. 74). The tour is recorded in almost identical terms in her journal, see. M. SHELLEY, *The Journals of Mary Shelley, 1814-1844*, Vol. I, p. 216. This, instead, is the episode in the version that Percy gave of it, on 10 July, in a letter addressed again to John and Maria Gisborne: "We have ridden – Mary & I – once only to a place called Prato fiorito on the top of the mountains" (P.B. SHELLEY, "18 June 1822", in ID., *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, Vol. II, p. 20).

[24] T. MEDWIN, *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, London, Thomas Cautley Newby, 1847, Vol. I, pp. 313-14.

[25] P.B. SHELLEY, *Epipsychidion*, in ID., *Selected Poems*, ed. T. WEBB, London, John Dent, 1977, p. 137, vv. 450-52.

[26] [M. SHELLEY], "Recollections of Italy", pp. 24-25.

was rooted in history and matched to another, unfortunately less flattering, primacy. That of bloody infighting:

> The other nations of Europe were yet immersed in barbarism, when Italy, where the light of civilization had never been wholly eclipsed, began to emerge from the darkness of the ruin of the Western Empire, and to catch from the East the returning rays of literature and science. [...] Lombardy and Tuscany, the most civilized districts of Italy, exhibited astonishing specimens of human genius; but at the same time they were torn to pieces by domestic faction, and almost destroyed by the fury of civil wars.[27]

This short passage introduces another form that 'Tuscanity' assumes in Mary Shelley's writings. As the novel *Valperga* shows, in them we find not only the natural landscape of Tuscany, but its history and traditions as well. According to the author, the freedom and autonomy that the medieval Tuscan republics enjoyed had to be a source of pride and rebirth for contemporary Italy. They could offer a stimulus to the independence movements that were stirring Italy and other Mediterranean countries in those years. The medieval Tuscan setting of *Valperga* became an opportunity for Mary Shelley to express herself on an issue she had much at heart: the political situation of Italy at her time. This is not only true of the novel, but also, and to an even greater extent, of "A Tale of the Passions", a story the author wrote while working on *Valperga* and published in January 1823 in the second issue of *The Liberal*, the periodical her husband conceived with Lord Byron and Leigh Hunt during their stay in Pisa.

The unfortunate protagonist of the story, Despina, is the Ghibelline counterpart of the protagonist of *Valperga*, the Guelph Euthanasia. Actually, "A Tale of the Passions" is a sort of prequel to the novel, as we are told that Castruccio Castracani's father has been the "faithful page and companion" of "the unfortunate Manfred, king of Naples".[28] Despina and Euthanasia are two brave and "pure" women who sacrifice themselves for a pure political ideal. The creation of Despina while working on the novel enabled the author to carry on a discourse *in utramque partem* to highlight, beyond factional divisions, a nobility of heart and a spirit of self-sacrifice that are peculiarly feminine and stand in sharp contrast with the cruelty of a power that rests, instead, on unbridled ambition, intrigue, and abuse. Despina and Euthanasia risk everything to reach a peaceful solution in a world dominated by power-hungry men who cannot see beyond war and violence.[29]

As hinted above, setting the story in thirteenth-century Tuscany enabled the author to introduce the contemporary 'Italian question', a topic of great importance for the circle that revolved around *The Liberal*. The narrator passes judgment on the events: on the fate of the house of Swabia, on Charles d'Anjou, and on the role of Pope Clement

[27] M. Shelley, *Valperga*, ed. T. Rajan, p. 57.

[28] *Ibidem*, p. 58.

[29] The ways in which Mary Shelley, in various of her works, engages in a counter-discourse aimed at denouncing the patriarchal system on which the (male) concept of fame is founded, and proposes instead a different logic, based on human affections and universal love, are explored in my essay "'The most civilized district of Italy': Mary Shelley's Tuscan Tales Between History, Literary Echoes and Politics", in C. Del Grazia e G. Milone (a cura di), *Immagini e paesaggi della Toscana nella tradizione letteraria e artistica europea*, Lucca, Edizioni La Vela, 2022, pp. 15-38.

IV, the 'arch enemy' of Manfred of Swabia first, and then of his nephew Corradino.[30] Interestingly, such judgments are expressed using a terminology that is often blatantly anachronistic when applied to the thirteenth century. Despina, for instance, while pleading her cause with Lostendardo, the villain of the story, passionately exclaims: "if you could hear the united voice of Italy".[31] In this patent anachronism we find an explicit reference to the unification of Italy, which the Pisan Circle advocated. In the same confrontation, the girl also declares that the Italians are born free, and defines the Pope as "the enemy of freedom and virtue".[32] Then, in the final part of the story, when the king of Naples defeats Corradino and has him executed in the marketplace at Naples, we are even told that "the same tragedy was acted on those shores which has been renewed in our days",[33] and the sobbing subjects who mourn the death of Corradino are called "oppressed and conquered".[34] The progressist readers of *The Liberal* could not fail to grasp the connection with the political situation of their time. Actually, only a couple of years earlier, in 1820-1821, the Sicilian, Neapolitan, and Piedmontese insurrectional movements had been crushed by king Ferdinand and the Austrians, with the implicit support of Pope Pius VII, who had excommunicated the Carbonari in 1817.

If in *Valperga* we only find a covert reference to the Italian risings (to the Piedmontese insurrection, to be precise), in "A Tale of the Passions" the author is much more explicit both in offering political evaluations and in encouraging the Italian cause, which, as the following extracts show, finds a prefiguration in the opposition to the foreign "tyrant" Charles d'Anjou:

> Charles himself has left [Florence], and is gone to Naples to prepare for this war. But he is detested there, as a tyrant and a robber, and Corradino will be received in the Regno as a saviour.[35]

> Let [Charles] return to Provence, and reign with paltry despotism over the luxurious and servile French; the free-born Italians require another Lord. […] Their king, like them, should be clothed in the armour of valour and simplicity.[36]

The greater degree of explicitness that we find in this story is not surprising: *Valperga* had to find a publisher, and the reputation of 'radicals' that the Shelley circle had earned made the task anything but easy. In fact, when Percy wrote to the publisher Charles Ollier to propose the publication of the novel, he inserted a postscript precisely to insist that it was not a risky enterprise, since "the novel ha[d] not the smallest tincture of any peculiar theories in politics or religion".[37] When writing for a declaredly reformist periodical, the author was instead permitted far greater freedom. What in *Valperga* was a fleetingly suggested, allusive subtext, in "A Tale of the Passions" could come out into the open.[38]

[30] [M. SHELLEY], "A Tale of the Passions", *The Liberal. Verse and Prose from the South*, 1 (2), 1823, p. 321.
[31] *Ibidem*, p. 307.
[32] *Ibidem*, p. 310.
[33] *Ibidem*, p. 323.
[34] *Ibidem*, p. 325.
[35] *Ibidem*, p. 299.
[36] *Ibidem*, p. 310.
[37] P.B. SHELLEY, "25 September 1821", in ID., *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, Vol. II, p. 355.
[38] For a more complete analysis of how the story narrated in "A Tale of the Passions" stands as a prefiguration

In the tale, we find History with a capital H. It opens on a description of the situation of Italy after Manfred's defeat.[39] Battles are mentioned, some of which fought in Tuscany, such as that of Montaperti, where the son of the elderly couple with whom the narrative begins was killed:

"Since the battle of Monte Aperto, thou hast never been well washed of [the blood] shed by thee and thy confederates; — and how could ye? for the Arno has never since run clear of the blood then spilt". — "And if the sea were red with that blood, still while there is any of the Guelphs' to spill, I am ready to spill it, were it not for thee. Thou dost well to mention Monte Aperto, and thou wouldst do better to remember over whom its grass now grows".[40]

In the concluding section, the events that led to the tragic end of Corradino are summarised: his advance first, then his defeat by the forces of Charles d'Anjou at Tagliacozzo, up to his execution in the marketplace at Naples.[41]

In "A Tale of the Passions", however, we also find microhistory, as the narrator dwells abundantly on the daily life of ordinary people. The author borrowed this aspect chiefly from two of the many historical texts on the Italian Middle Ages she had consulted as research for *Valperga*: Ludovico Muratori's *Dissertations on Italian Antiquities* (1751-1755) and Giovanni Villani's *New Chronicle* (published posthumously in 1537). The writer, in fact, had turned to her sources not only to acquire a thorough knowledge of the events, but to learn about the customs and traditions as well. A peculiar headgear of that period, the "*fazioles*", is mentioned; we are then told that, at that time, it was usual to place one plate of *minestra* in the middle of the table so that everyone could eat with his spoon from it.[42] Great attention is also paid to tradition and folklore, as the following description of the first of May celebrations shows:

The first of May was ever a day of rejoicing and festivity at Florence. The youth of both sexes, of the highest rank, paraded the streets, crowned with flowers, and singing the canzonets of the day. In the evening they assembled in the *Piazza del Duomo*, and spent the hours in dancing. The *Carroccio* was led through the principal streets, the ringing of its bell drowned in the peals that rang from every belfry in the city, and in the music of fifes and drums which made a part of the procession that followed it. […] The principal families vied with each other in the display of their magnificence during the festival. The knights followed the *Carroccio* on horseback, and the windows were filled with ladies who leant upon gold-inwoven carpets, while their own dresses, at once simple and elegant, their only ornaments flowers, contrasted with the glittering tapestry and the brilliant colours of the flags of the various communities.[43]

In "A Tale of the Passions" we have the anecdotal aspect of history too, which is embodied by Buzeccha, the Saracen chess player. This character is drawn from Villani's *Chronicle*. In the passage below, we also meet Guido Novello dei Guidi, the son-in-law of Count Ugolino della Gherardesca of Dantesque memory. Mary Shelley had read,

of the contemporary Italian cause, see my article "Con occhi britannici. Mary Shelley, Felicia Hemans e i moti rivoluzionari italiani del 1820-21", *LEA - Lingue e Letterature d'Oriente e d'Occidente*, 11, 2022, pp. 61-78.

39 See [M. SHELLEY], "A Tale of the Passions", p. 289.

40 *Ibidem*, p. 294.

41 See *ibidem*, pp. 321-25.

42 See *ibidem*, pp. 290, 297.

43 *Ibidem*, pp. 289-90.

in Italian, the whole *Divine Comedy*, which is an important literary intertext for both this story and the novel *Valperga*. There, she also found the character of Manfred of Swabia, whose virtual presence pervades "A Tale of the Passions":

> After a while, Buzeccha introduced his favourite subject of chess-playing; he recounted some wonderfully good strokes he had achieved, and related to Ricciardo how before the *Palagio del Popolo*, in the presence of Count Guido Novello de' Giudi [*sic*], then *Vicare* of the city, he had played an hour at three chess-boards with three of the best chess-players in Florence, playing two by memory, and one by sight; and out of three games which made the board, he had won two.[44]

Apart from the material Mary Shelley derived from her sources, however, "A Tale of the Passions" also feeds on her experiential knowledge. It is evident, in fact, that the author was very familiar with Tuscan localities. Sites of Florence are mentioned: Piazza del Duomo, the Palagio del Governo, and Porta Romana. We find Lucca and Vicopisano, and Pisa, with the Arno and Palazzo Lanfranchi, where Lord Byron and Leigh Hunt lived at the time the story was written. Then, we have the language. Just as she did in her letters, Shelley scattered the pages of her story (especially the first and last) with Italian words, which were often printed in italics: "*minestra*", "*festa*", "*contadini*", "*Vicario*", and "Podesta". We even find phrases, such as "Gesu Maria!" or "Messer lo Forestiere".[45] This is further proof of the author's profound Anglo-Italianness, which emerges as much from her letters and journals as it does from her works.

What this paper has endeavoured to show is how Mary Shelley's love for Tuscany was reflected in her writings, where the region is copiously and variously present through its natural landscape and topography, climate, language, literature, history, traditions, and, also, the daily life of its people. Such richness and variety are due to the winning combination of a knowledge derived from personal experience and a careful, meticulous, and 'passionate' study of texts and documents.

[44] *Ibidem*, p. 300. This, instead, is the passage in the source: "In questi tempi venne in Firenze uno Saracino ch'avea nome Buzzeca, ed era il migliore maestro di giucare a scacchi, e in su il palagio del popolo dinanzi al conte Guido Novello giucò a un'ora a tre scacchieri co' migliori maestri di scacchi di Firenze, cogli due a mente, e coll'uno a veduta, e gli due giuochi vinse, e l'uno fece tavola; la qual cosa fu tenuta grande maraviglia" (G. VILLANI, *Nuova Cronica*, a cura di G. PORTA, Parma, Fondazione Pietro Bembo/Guanda, [1537] 1991, p. 349). Mary Shelley also published an essay on Giovanni Villani, which appeared in the fourth (and last) issue of *The Liberal*.

[45] See [M. SHELLEY], "A Tale of the Passions", pp. 291, 296, 297, 300, 317, 318, 319. As for her letters, although inserts from other foreign languages often appear, Italian (sometimes adapted to English) is the most consistent presence. The author ranges from opening and closing formulas to entire sentences, exclamations, single words, and quotations of modes and expressions that she found peculiar. Her correspondence even includes twenty-one letters written entirely in Italian.

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